STARDUST & SOLILOQUIES

BY TRI VUONG

ACT 2
CHAPTER 4

OSCAR'S MENTAL DIARY
ENTRY # 235

TIME: UNKNOWN
DATE: UNKNOWN (PROBABLY STILL 1994)

STATUS UPDATE: ECTOPLASMIC BODY HAS DISSIPATED...MMM WELL... A WHILE AGO. DIFFICULT TO KEEP TRACK OF TIME UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES. WERE I A NORMAL MAN, I COULD ATTEMPT TO MEASURE THE PASSAGE OF TIME THROUGH ALTERNATIVE MEANS, SUCH AS THE BEATING OF MY HEART.

BUT ALAS... I AM JUST A SKULL.

ONCE AGAIN, LET'S START WITH A REVIEW OF THE EVENTS THAT HAVE TRANSPIRED.

MY LAST MEMORY WAS EDMUND SUFFERING SOME SORT OF TRAUMATIC EPISODE DURING THE CONVERSION OF THE WHALE SONG TO ECTOPLASMIC ENERGY.

HYPOTHESIS: WE OVERLOADED THE CATALYTIC CONVERTER THUS RESULTING IN A SPILLAGE OF EXCESS ECTOPLASM WHICH IN TURN AWAKENED THE ECTOPUS.

CONJECTURE: THE ECTOPUS SEIZED CONTROL. POSSIBLY CAUSING HARM. INJURY... OR DEATH... OF THE WHALE AND/OR THE CREW OF THE CASSIOPEIA. NEXT LOGICAL STEP WOULD BE TO DISTANCE THEMSELVES FROM THE ECTOPUS AND MYSELF TO PREVENT FURTHER INCIDENTS.

OBSERVATION: AWAKENED TO BROKEN CHAIN LINKS BUT NO SIGNS OF DEBRIS FROM A SHIP. THIS LEADS ME TO BELIEVE THAT THE CASSIOPEIA AND AT LEAST SOME OF HER CREW SURVIVED THE ENCOUNTER

HYPOTHESIS: IF THE CASSIOPEIA DID INDEED EXPEND HER RESERVES OF WHALE SONG TO FIGHT OFF THE ECTOPUS, SHE WOULD NEED A PLACE TO REFUEL AND TEND TO POSSIBLE INJURIES.

GIVEN HER LAST KNOWN CO-ORDINATES. SHE WOULD PROBABLY MAKE HER WAY TO... AH...
... THE LIGHT HOUSE...
MAYBE I SHOULD JUST FLOAT HERE...
I CURRENTLY HAVE NO FORM OF LOCOMOTION. MY PRIORITIES SHOULD BE PRESERVATION OF MY PHYSICAL WELL-BEING AND MENTAL FACULTIES.

SPEAKING OF WHICH, IT'S TIME FOR MY SCHEDULED NERVOUS BREAKDOWN.
*&D^$FHJ *#@!D#$%!!!
IT'S IMPORTANT TO BLOW OFF SOME STEAM LEST I GO MAD.

ONE POSITIVE SIDE EFFECT TO BEING TOSSED OVERBOARD AND LEFT FOR DEAD BY MY FRIENDS IS ALL THE TIME AFFORDED TO ME TO STUDY THE STRANGE PHENOMENA OF THE SEA BELOW.

A SCHOOL OF DETRITUS FISH HAVE TAKEN AN INTEREST IN ME, OFTEN BRINGING ME VARIOUS BITS OF JUNK THEY'VE COME ACROSS. SO FAR THEY HAVEN'T BROUGHT ME ANYTHING USEFUL.

THEY EXHIBIT CURIOSITY AND RUDIMENTARY INTELLIGENCE, AS WELL AS SOCIAL HIERARCHY. I DARESAY, THEY SEEM DOWNRIGHT FRIENDLY.
BLUB.
DOINK.

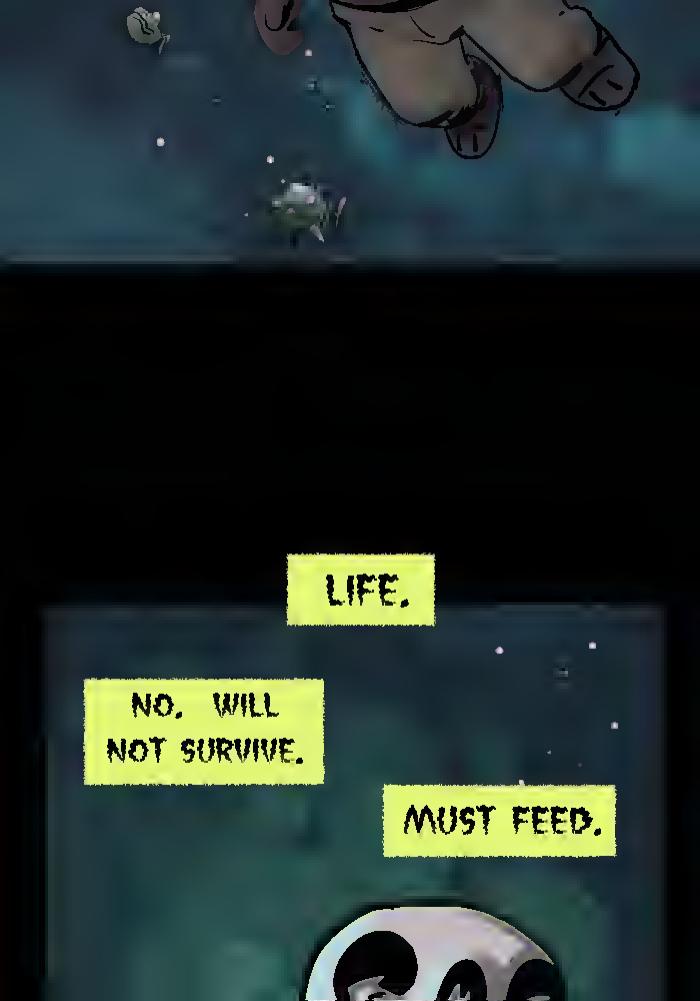
IT'S DIFFICULT TO KEEP TRACK OF INDIVIDUAL DETRITUS FISH. HOWEVER. THEIR BODIES SEEMS TO OCCASIONALLY CHANGE. WITH NEW BITS OF GEARS AND SCREWS FORMING EXTRA FINS AND GILLS.

MY CURRENT THEORY IS THAT THEY EVOLVED FROM THE VARIOUS BITS OF JUNK CAST INTO OUR OCEANS. OF COURSE NOT EVERYTHING FROM OUR WORLD ENDS UP DOWN HERE BUT OBJECTS WITH AN EMOTIONAL RESONANCE SEEM TO EVENTUALLY DRIFT INTO THE ASTRAL OCEAN.

FASCINATING.
COULD THE MEMORY OF LIFE GIVE BIRTH TO LIFE ITSELF?

IN MY DARKER MOMENTS, I'VE THOUGHT ABOUT DISASSEMBLING A FEW OF MY FISHY FRIENDS AND JURY RIGGING SOME SORT OF PROPELLER SYSTEM BUT WHO AM I TO END ANOTHER LIFE FOR MY OWN GAIN.

THANKFULLY, I DO SEEM TO BE DRIFTING IN AN ASTRAL CURRENT HEADING TOWARDS THE SURFACE. GIVEN MY PROJECTED VELOCITY, I WILL PROBABLY BREACH THE ASTRAL OCEAN BACK TO OUR OWN OCEAN IN ABOUT 37 YEARS. AFTER THAT, IT WILL ONLY BE A MATTER OF TIME BEFORE I FLOAT BACK TO LAND!

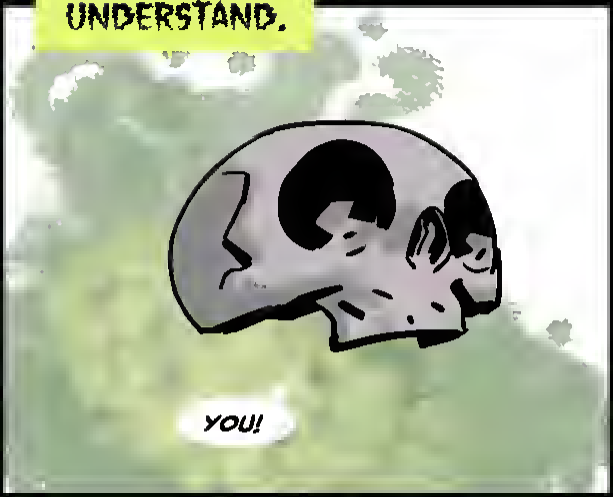

LIFE.
NO. WILL NOT SURVIVE.
MUST FEED.

HEY.

KILL FISH.
LIVE.

WHAT'S HAPPENING?

NOT UNDERSTAND.

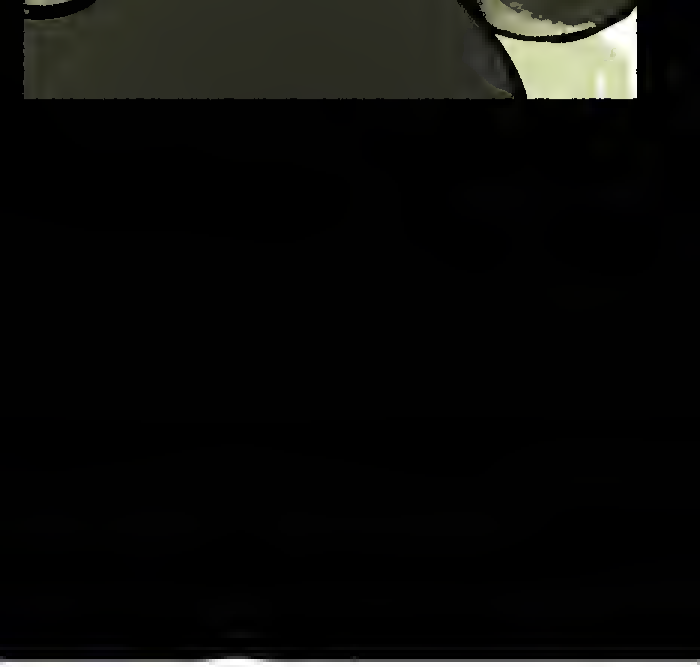


I WANT
LIFE.

TO BE TRAPPED FOR ALL ETERNITY WITH YOU!!!
HAVEN'T YOU DONE ENOUGH???

LOOK AT THE MESS WE'RE IN! BY THE TIME I GET BACK TO THE SURFACE, EVERYBODY I KNOW WILL BE DEAD!
I HATE YOU!

WHY...
HATE?


WHY???
LOOK AT ME! I'M JUST A SKULL!
YOU'VE TAKEN EVERYTHING FROM ME! MY BODY! MY FACE! MY LIFE!

ALL I HAVE IS MY MIND AND MY NAME!
OSCAR ZAHN!

NO...
MY NAME...

...
WHAT?

MY NAME.

ZON.

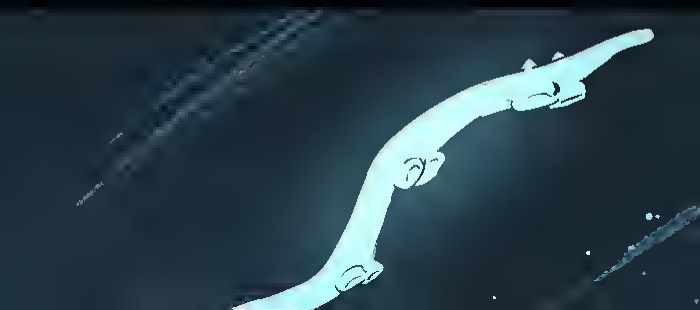
THE HELL YOU TALKIN' ABOUT?

I ZON.
MUST NOT EXPIRE.
HEY! LET GO! WHAT ARE YOU

DOING???

MUST EVOLVE.

NYAAARRGZGGHH!!!!



HUNGRY.

TO BE CONTINUED...

AUTHOR'S NOTE:

HEY GUYS, WELCOME BACK!

SOME PRETTY BIG REVELATIONS THIS WEEK HUH? (AT LEAST I THINK SO). SEEMS LIKE THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN OSCAR AND HIS "COMPANION" MAY BE MORE COMPLICATED THAN WE THOUGHT!

I'M REALLY ENJOYING MAKING THESE LONGER EPISODES. IT'S SIGNIFICANTLY MORE WORK BUT I FEEL LIKE I CAN TELL A MEATIER CHUNK OF THE STORY AND NOT RELY SO MUCH ON CLIFFHANGERS TO GET YOU GUYS TO COME BACK. WOULD LOVE TO KNOW WHAT YOU GUYS THINK.

ANYHOOZ, BACK TO WORK ON THE NEXT EPISODE!

... AFTER A LITTLE BREATH OF THE WILD BREAK ...

- TRI

BIG THANKS TO MICHAEL A. K. FOR HIS VERY GENEROUS PATREON PLEDGE THIS WEEK!

YOUR SUPPORT IS GREATLY APPRECIATED!

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